



Barnes



Spaatz



Elmindorf



Andrews



Arnold



Quesada



Vandenberg



Twining

# November is Aviation History Month

## D-M hosted aviation pioneers at ideal flying location from very beginning

By Gwen Lisa  
355th Civil Engineer Squadron  
natural/cultural resource manager  
Photos courtesy the USAF Museum Archive

On a bleak winter morning in December 1903, the history of a new era was written when an awkward, odd-looking, heavier-than-air contraption took flight on a cold beach at Kittyhawk, North Carolina.

From that one, seemingly insignificant event, the world was never the same. Aviation and flying fever overtook the country. Airplane builders and flying schools popped up everywhere. The richer folks all had to have an airplane—it was the latest status symbol. To own an automobile *and* an airplane meant you had surely made it to the top of the social ladder.

This wave of aviation hysteria was not lost on the small southwestern town of Tucson, Ariz.

Two full years before Arizona achieved statehood (1912) and only seven years after the Wright brothers' astonishing feat, Tucson began earning a reputation as "an ideal place for aviators."

At the behest of Emanuel Drachman and other Old Pueblo businessmen and the promise of \$2,000 guaranteed if he would fly his Curtiss-Wright Pusher bi-plane from Elysian Grove Amusement Park to an airstrip in town, Charles Hamilton, an aviation pioneer, packed his airplane into crates and put it and himself on the next train to Tucson.

Drachman and his associates planned to make a tidy profit on the venture by selling tickets to this marvelous demonstration of flight. But even though the flight was a success, the business venture was not. Drachman neglected to consider the highly visible nature of an aircraft in flight, and the equally practical nature of the town's residents. Even a drunken cowpoke won't pay to see something he can see for free!

Nevertheless, the seed of aviation in Tucson had been sown and the quiet desert skies were never quite the same after that.

### Katherine Stinson

In 1915, a 15-year old teenager, Katherine Stinson used her Partridge Tractor biplane to give acrobatic aerial exhibitions during the Pima County Fair. More importantly, she departed the fairgrounds each afternoon with a pouch of mail to publicize the newly inaugurated parcel post service.

After flying low over downtown Tucson, she dropped the pouch of mail into the vacant lot behind the post office. That accomplishment earned recognition as U. S. Mail Route Number 668001 and garnered Stinson a permanent place in the annals of Tucson aviation history.

Even before Stinson's demonstrations, the air-minded members of the Tucson Chamber of Commerce had formed an Aviation Committee; a very significant achievement in light of the fact that the city had no airfield as such, nor any citizens who owned aircraft.

The Old Pueblo's sincere interest in and appreciation of aviation so impressed a pioneering Army flyer, Maj. Theodore Macaulay, that he

described Tucson in a 1919 article for the "Saturday Evening Post" as " ... a friendly and appreciative city ... an ideal place for aviators."

Perhaps because of Macaulay's article praising Tucson's interest in aviation, the city caught the attention of officials of the Air Service. The mayor of Tucson (O. C. Parker) received a letter from the Air Service on May 9, 1919 requesting the city consider construction of a permanent airfield.

An 83-acre tract of land near the present-day rodeo grounds was selected as the site for the new field. After trying several names, Tucson Municipal Flying Field was the name selected in 1923. That unpaved airport served the local community faithfully until 1927 when a new facility was constructed.

Several significant aviation events occurred during the period that the first field was in operation.

### Lowell Smith

In 1924, Capt. Lowell Smith landed his Douglas World Cruiser, the Chicago, at the field while completing his record-setting "Around the World Flight."

Although he remained for only a few hours, Smith was destined to reappear in Tucson's history 18 years later as the commander of Davis-Monthan Field.

### Dewey Simpson

The following year, one of the most colorful personages in the development of the Old Pueblo's aviation heritage appeared on the scene. Staff Sgt. Dewey Simpson was sent to the Tucson Municipal Flying Field by the U. S. Air Service to establish a refueling and service stop for Army planes that were landing in Tucson with increased frequency.

He had previously served in France and knew most of the Army pilots personally. As such, he soon became a sort of de facto airport manager.

### Charles Lindbergh

It was during his assignment there that demands on the old field began to expand dramatically. As a result, thought was given to the construction of a new airport.

The new facility, located southeast of the city and just east of the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks, was completed in late 1927. Charles Lindbergh, on a coast-to-coast tour of the country celebrating his transatlantic flight, was on hand to dedicate the new facility as Davis-Monthan Field. Unknown at the time, the new airfield would later serve as the nucleus of Davis-Monthan Air Force Base.

### American Airlines

Private and commercial business continued at a rapid pace at the new field. Regularly scheduled airline flights by Standard Airlines (later absorbed by American Airlines) began in 1928.

The first military presence at the field began soon after its dedication when Simpson entered the picture once again by relocating his refueling/service operations to the new municipal airport. He brought with him a logbook in which he recorded the comings and goings of the field's many customers.

The log reads like a virtual "Who's Who" of early aviation greats. Included within its pages are names, such as: Foulois, Lindbergh, Earhart and Doolittle. Many of the signatures belonged to daring pioneers who were instrumental in establishing what would later become the United States Air Force. At least 19 of these young pilots had bases named in their honor. They, and others whose signatures appear in the log, were men of distinction who were associated with record-breaking events.

### Frank Lahm

Brig. Gen. Frank Lahm, the first military officer personally selected by Orville Wright to receive pilot training in 1909, flew through Davis-Monthan Field the first time in 1926. After three hours and seven minutes of training, he

took his first flight. Maj. Carl Spaatz made several visits. One visit to Davis-Monthan in 1929 came only two weeks after his record-setting endurance flight in the Question Mark.

### 1925 and 1936

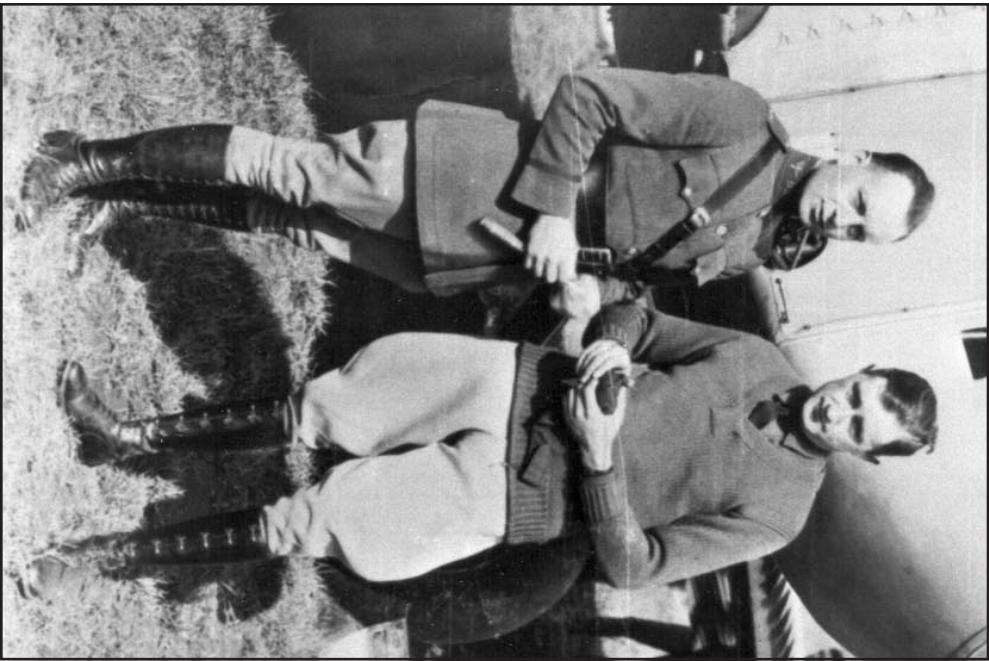
Hugh Elmindorf Capt. Hugh Elmindorf who pioneered high altitude formation flying flew into D-M in 1929. Maj. H. "Hap" Arnold's first visit was March 17, 1930. He became the first Air Force five-star general.

### Nathan Twining

Nathan Twining, the first Air Force Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, made his first landing in 1926.

### Bernard Foulois

Maj. Gen. Bernard Foulois made one trip to the old Pueblo in 1932 while serving as Chief of the Army Air Corps. And the list goes on and on



Capt. Lowell Smith (left) poses in front of the Chicago, the aircraft he flew a record setting flight around the world.

of distinguished military aviators.

### Celebrities

But the military weren't the only ones using D-M Field. Remember, the airfield was a municipal airport until late 1940s. Barnstormers such as Wiley Post came through often. Hollywood was enraptured with flight. Movie stars like Wallace Beery, Roscoe Tanner, and Noah Beery made regular stops at the field on their way to and from southwestern resorts. The signatures of Anthony Fokker, Clyde Cessna, and his brother Eldon also appear in the log. Amelia Earhart made three trips to Davis-Monthan Field and several members of Delaware's famous DuPont family came through on occasion. Pancho Barnes, the notorious, acrobatic aerialist made one landing on her way back to her California ranch.

The field of aviation and everything associated with it grew at an enormous pace in the 11 years in which Simpson kept his log.

One can clearly see the progression of history in every page of the book. Tucson embraced aviation with a passion. Foresighted city fathers understood the impact flight would have on the country and did not miss the opportunity to take advantage of it. They made sure the airport became a reality and ensured land was available to grow the airport and the industry.

### Display

The original book is on display in a case in the Base Operations lobby, but there is a replica of the book that visitors can leaf through, study, look for familiar names, and imagine what it must have been like so many years ago when aviation and flight was no longer a dream but a full-blown reality.



(Left to right) Maj. Carl Spaatz, Capt. Ira Eaker, Lt. H.A. Halverson, Lt. E.R. Quesada, and Sgt. R.W. Hooe were members of the "Question Mark" crew. The Air Corps set a world flight endurance record of more than 150 hours in a souther Fokker C-24 Jan. 1, 1929. The aircraft took off from Metropolitan Airport at Van Nuys, Calif. and circled over the reliability of the plane, its engines, and its accessories, and the effects of continuous flight upon its crew members.